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EEB FOR A/S SULLIVAN

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES EXPANDED ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT
WITH GOC MINISTERS

REF: 07 BOGOTA 6957

¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Ambassador hosted a breakfast on February 4 for senior Colombian government economic policymakers to discuss ideas for expanded bilateral economic engagement to reinforce the benefits of the pending U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement (CTPA). The Ambassador emphasized that the CTPA remains the U.S. government's top economic priority for Colombia, but highlighted numerous areas with potential for closer bilateral cooperation. The meeting built off of EEB A/S Sullivan's pledge to President Uribe in October 2006 to broaden the U.S.-Colombian economic relationship. GOC officials present reacted positively to the initiative and offered specific ideas for small business, biofuels, and science and technology collaboration. Presidential Economic Advisor Cecilia Alvarez and Minister of Trade Luis Guillermo Plata agreed to coordinate follow-up with post to prioritize ideas, elaborate detailed proposals, and discuss rollout mechanisms. END SUMMARY

¶12. (SBU) The Ambassador presented the initiative to Plata, Minister of Finance Oscar Zuluaga, Vice Minister of Agriculture Juan Salazar Rueda, Director of National Planning (DNP) Carolina Renteria, Presidential Economic Advisor Cecilia Alvarez, and Foreign Ministry North America Director Patricia Cortes. In doing so, the Ambassador reiterated our intention to find ways to broaden bilateral economic cooperation across new sectors in order to multiply the benefits of the CTPA once approved and implemented. He emphasized that the new areas of economic engagement would not function as a substitute, but rather a complement, for the CTPA.

¶13. (SBU) Pointing to EEB A/S Sullivan's commitment to President Uribe in October 2006 to seek out areas for increased bilateral economic cooperation, the Ambassador outlined possible initiatives in the areas of housing finance, facilitating credit for small and medium enterprises, technical assistance on tax collection, a cargo open skies agreement, a regular dialogue on telecommunications, assistance on processes for environmental certifications for biofuels, customs facilitation, concluding agreements on science and technology cooperation, sharing best practices on small business development, and technical assistance on developing science-based biotechnology standards. The Ambassador noted that several USG agencies, including the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC)

(reftel) and EX-IM Bank had recently visited Colombia and expressed interest in increasing their activities within Colombia.

4. (SBU) The GOC representatives all welcomed the initiative and agreed on the need to quickly prioritize and elaborate ideas for further consideration. In particular, they cited strong interest in small business development, biofuels, and science and technology. Plata suggested also examining cooperation on competitiveness issues, while Zuluaga stated that Colombia could benefit from technical expertise in infrastructure planning and development. Renteria proposed that technical staff look at prospects for cooperation on income generation in the context of reinforcing the economic development goals of Plan Colombia as well as transitioning to reduced levels of USG support for Plan Colombia programs and policies.

¶5. (SBU) Alvarez and Plata agreed to coordinate GOC follow-up, including designating technical staff to work with post's Economic Section on developing a prioritized list of detailed proposals for further consideration. The Ambassador encouraged the GOC to move quickly in order to maintain momentum and to consider how the GOC would like to eventually rollout a broadened bilateral economic agenda with the U.S. The ministers committed to establishing a working mechanism by the end of February.

¶6. (U) Prior to the meeting, post sent an outline of the ideas for discussion to EEB and WHA. Post will continue to keep the Department informed as more detailed discussions of potential cooperation areas proceed.

Brownfield